

UNITED STATES INFORMATION SERVICE

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION

MEMORANDUM

27 October, 1949

To: Mr. Howard Chaille  
Communications Division  
Department of State

From: E. H. Frampton  
Chief Communications  
USIS London

1. Herewith notes on meeting with:-

Brigadier-General R. Gambier-Parry  
Director of Communications  
Foreign Office

and

Colonel E. Maltby  
Assistant to Director of Communications  
Foreign Office

Wednesday 26th October 1949  
The British Foreign Office, Whitehall

2. Brigadier Gambier-Parry first outlined the background of the formation of the Foreign Office Communications System:-

- (a) In view of the tension in Europe the scheme was first put forward to the British Government in 1938 and was approved. Four out stations were installed at the British Embassies concerned one of these being at Prague and one at Warsaw.

The events of late 1938, and mid 1939, proved the value of these stations to such an extent that immediate authority was given to extend the system and a complete organization was set up within the Foreign Office.

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- (b) By the beginning of World War II - September 1939 - a total of 62 foreign stations had been set up. With the development of events, these stations became more of an intelligence (G2) value than diplomatic and were used extensively throughout the period of the War years.
- (c) At the conclusion of hostilities, the experience gained during the War, had shown the necessity for the continuation of the communications system - and at meetings held in London - the service was approved and called the "Diplomatic Wireless Service". However, its functions continued to have intelligence value.

3. This new Service was ranked level with the three fighting arms - was on an equal footing of importance - and was set up with its own complete administrative, technical and training units.

4. The method adopted in setting up all outposts was to ensure complete mobility. Therefore, all outposts were equipped with low power stations (nothing mainly over 150 watts output), using main LINK stations for relay purposes.

No automatic equipment is used at outposts, other than certain selected relay points, and hand speed morse is used as the method of signal transmission.

5. With the re-organization on a Peace-time basis there are now approximately 47 stations in operation.

Conferences were held between the Diplomatic Wireless Service and the Common Carriers, when it was agreed that Diplomatic Wireless Service would only pass "official diplomatic traffic", but it was left to the D.W.S. to decide "what was operational" and therefore no conflict has so far arisen with the Common Carriers. In the event that Foreign Office system goes "out" then use is made of Common Carriers.

6. In installing equipment and systems within the Embassies concerned the Diplomatic Wireless Service decided on the method of approach in accordance with the "concord" or otherwise, existing in the country concerned. In some instances a direct approach was made by the Ambassador, whereas in other cases "other channels" were used (by private arrangement with Minister of Interior, Chief of Police, Bureau of Communications, etc) but in each case the attitude adopted was "the right of a representative of a Country to communicate with his King (or Head of State".)

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It is largely left to the Head of each Mission to negotiate (or not) in his own way, and in every case it is made reciprocal, with the country concerned having the right to set up a communications system in the United Kingdom.

In the majority of cases the Government of the country concerned is aware of the existence of Foreign Office Communications System.

7. The question of "legality" has been discussed with the Foreign Office Legal Department, and under International Law, and the legal right for the establishment of radio in an Embassy is based, not upon written law but upon usage and the Diplomatic privilege or right of a representative to contact or communicate with his home base (see para 6).

8. Equipment and Staff Organization

- (a) The standard type of set used in nearly all Embassies (outposts) is one developed and made by the Diplomatic Wireless Service.

Standard Set Mark 33. 35 watts  
using power packs (battery operated)  
or small gasoline driven engines,  
approximately 1 HP.

- (b) Standard type antennae in use are end fed horizontals.
- (c) The Foreign Office station in the United Kingdom has a receiving site of 32 Double Bays, using mostly HRO National, and AR-88 receivers, and twenty miles away (located in the area 40 miles North of London) is the transmitter site with sixty transmitters, nearly all RCA - developing 300 to 400 watts.
- (d) There are some automatic positions, to main, centralized, outposts, but the majority of outposts are handspeed morse and where necessary working on a link system through a main relay point.

There are very few radio teletype channels and no multiplex (VF Carrier) systems in use.

- (e) The main Foreign Office Transmitter and Receiving Stations are linked with the Foreign Office proper by a teleprinter (teletype) system.

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9. Personnel

- (a) Operators are recruited from all walks of life and usually enrolled young and trained. Every recruit must be in possession of PMG-1 certificate (Post Master General Class 1) which ensures a high standard of efficiency in operating and technical ability. Personnel are grouped as "Operator-Technician" or "Engineer-Technician".
- (b) Each Operator-Technician employed is able to service, maintain and repair his equipment, in addition to the operation.

There are approximately 800 personnel of all grades, including outpost and homebase staff.

- (c) A special team of highly skilled engineer-technicians are processed for immediate departure to any part of the World, and complete sets of equipment are packed ready for immediate movement.

In the event of a major fault - even complete destruction of an outpost plant - two technicians with all equipment take off by air - and within 12 hours of arrival can guarantee to have the outpost in communication again.

- (d) Correspondence courses are arranged for outpost staff to keep pace with developments, to improve their knowledge and ability and periodic examinations are held. If a technician fails to pass an exam he does not receive any increment in salary.
- (e) Usual terms of service for operator-technicians is three years overseas service then one year at home station.

10. Costs

- (a) Bearing in mind that the transmitter and receiving station in the United Kingdom was set up and paid for during the War years, and that a large proportion of the outpost stations were also provided during the War, the annual estimate (Budget) for the Diplomatic Wireless Service is 200,000 pounds per year. This sum covers personnel and equipment at home and overseas, covers the research Department, repairs, manufacturing and engineering projects, social services, medical and such like.

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The theory expounded is "the more this service is used, the more it saves".

- (b) The statistics available for 1947 - 1948 show that taking everything into account (that is the actual overall expenditure of the D.W.S. as against the number of groups (wordage) transmitted) the average cost per word was 1.8 pence. The same traffic by common carrier at government rate would have been 5.2 pence per word.
- (c) The above costs and estimates do not include the Foreign Office Trans-atlantic Radio Service (London - Canada) the overall cost of which averages .6 pence per word.
- (d) The Budget estimate, however, provides for expansion and probable needs of the future.

11. In conclusion Brigadier General Gambier-Parry offered the opportunity of visiting the Foreign Office main Transmitter and Receiving Stations, of speaking with officials and staffs in various branches, and is willing to discuss, in the planning stages, methods of closer co-operation, exchange of ideas, assistance in British controlled areas and the possibility of an "integrated" system, should such be of mutual advantage.

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